

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date 26 September 2017

Subject: Planning & Governance Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Philip

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning & Governance Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Development Management

Building Control

The financial situation in building control is continuing to do well. The budget for Building Control for August 2017 is £34,630 and the annual budget for 2017/18 set at £450,000. The actual income for August 2017 (Period 5) is £55,198. This is exceptionally good as it shows BC has exceeded their monthly budget target for each of April/May/June/July and August of the 2017/18 financial year.

This means that taking five months actual income plus seven months budget it is possible that BC's income for the year may be as high as £518,000 and exceed their budget by over £60,000. BC has already achieved nearly 60% of their income in 2017/18 with seven months to go.

This is very encouraging news and illustrates how well Building Control is doing. This also supports Building Control's Workforce Development Plan which is designed to develop 'home grown' building surveyors combined with active steps to improve staffing levels. These are positive steps Building Control is taking to enable their service to adopt a more competitive approach in increasing their market share despite significant competition from Approved Inspectors.

Development Control

Development Control continues to be slightly below its monthly budget targets which may be partly due to the current economic and political climate combined with a degree of uncertainty regarding when the new Local Plan is to be adopted and what sites are selected for development within it.

The budget for DC for August 2017 (Period 5 2017/18) is £85,180 and the actual turnover was £48,988. DC has not been able to match their monthly budget figures for April to August 2017. However, the volume of planning applications remains the same as the previous year, and the revenue shortfall is probably due to the major planning applications which appear to be being held back by developers.

Our data and income figures indicate that for Development Control in;

- April 2016 to August 2016 there were 1,394 planning applications submitted against a turnover of £405,675

- April 2017 to August 2017 1,391 planning applications have been submitted against a turnover £315,008

DC Pre-Application Income continues to perform well against budget recording £46,386 as compared with the budget of £42,833. This combined with same levels of planning applications is an indication that Planning is performing relatively well within a changing market.

Finally the total Development Control turnover for 2014/15 was £813,120, in 2015/16 it was £849,842 and 2016/17 our income was £975,468. It may be that setting our budget at £970,000 was a little optimistic for this year.

Land Charges

Unfortunately, there have been some long term staffing absences that are now impacting on the return of land charge searches, now sadly, well beyond the expected 6 day turnaround time. Some internal processes are currently being changed, together with the short-term employment of an agency officer and Cabinet approval of an 18 hour a week officer for 18 months, which will improve performance over the next couple of months.

2. PR and Information

Members of the Public Relations Team, working with other colleagues in ICT and across the Council have started work on developing a new Council website. This work sits alongside work being carried out to develop effective processes for our customer services function. Officers are currently assessing the most appropriate platform system and considering site structure. Work will be completed using in-house resources which may mean that capacity within Public Relations is reduced until its completion. The timescale for completion of this work will be reported once the project is scoped. Much will depend on the successful completion of online customer processes and the integration of the different systems that provide our web services.

3. Elections – Review and Canvass Update

A report will be made to the Governance Select Committee on 3 October 2017, reviewing the two major electoral events this year. Member's views will be sought at that meeting as to the any improvements that can be made to processes for the forthcoming district council elections in May 2018.

The electoral canvass began at the beginning of August and remains on target for completion by 30 November 2017. At the time of compilation of this report 77% of household forms had already been returned, the majority of these have been returned using the various on-line services. Further reminders have recently been despatched to residents. All Councillors help is needed to encourage registration but clearly this is a magnificent effort by residents.

4. Update on the Local Plan

Work continues to inform and support the Regulation 19 Pre Submission Publication Plan. The key work streams underway at present are:

- Site selection – work has commenced on the assessment of approximately 168 sites comprising a mix of new or amended residential/traveller sites and employment sites. The methodology for the process has been published on the Council's website, together with the list of sites being assessed;

- Transport modelling – work is continuing to be undertaken by Jacobs on behalf of Essex County Council / Epping Forest District Council to model the transportation impacts of the growth planned, and consider how improvements to sustainable transportation and key junctions can help to facilitate growth;
- Open Space, Playing Pitch and Indoor Sports Facilities Studies – the three interlinked studies are well progressed, and will help to identify requirements for future development which will inform the Infrastructure Delivery Plan;
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan – a significant amount of work has been undertaken and continues to progress in order to identify the infrastructure required to support future growth, together with how this will be funded and delivered. The work is being informed through discussions with infrastructure providers, EFDC / ECC Officers, local councillors (District / Town / Parish), neighbouring local authorities, and landowners / site promoters. A series of workshops took place over the summer with stakeholders which have helped to inform and progress the work being undertaken;
- Local Plan Viability Study – work is being undertaken to update the initial work undertaken in 2015, and to consider in greater detail the viability of growth planned taking into account the latest policy requirements;
- Employment Studies - Joint work to update the employment need within the Functional Economic Market Area and the District is being completed to inform the work on site selection;
- Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment; and
- Monitoring, housing trajectory and Housing Implementation Strategy – there is a need to ensure that the monitoring systems moving forward are as accurate as possible in order to ensure that the Council is able to monitor progress against the plan and forecasts for delivery. The Councils housing position with regard to the plan trajectory and the five year housing land supply will be of particular interest. An updated Housing Land Supply Statement is being prepared which will provide further details and inform the production of a Housing Implementation Strategy to support the Local Plan in due course.

The Council is also leading on work to develop a joint strategy and an 'Action Plan', with other relevant local authorities, which will address potential adverse impacts on the integrity of Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), as required under the Habitat Regulations 2010, and in accordance with the agreed Memorandum of Understanding. As the coordinating competent authority in relation to Epping Forest SAC, the Council is facilitating ongoing discussions and the work with relevant neighbouring local planning authorities, the City of London Corporation and Natural England.

In order to inform the ongoing site selection and Infrastructure Delivery Plan process, the Council held meetings with a number of Parish and Town Councils who are producing Neighbourhood Plans at the beginning of August. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss and consider work being undertaken in respect of site selection and infrastructure planning to inform emerging Neighbourhood Plans and the Local Plan.

The key issues in managing the programme relate to resources, the ability of external organisations, such as Essex County Council, in providing timely inputs into plan preparation (largely outside our control) and the interconnectivity of the various workstreams. The importance of maintaining a full team of appropriately skilled and effective officers and consultants cannot be underestimated.

Whilst progressing the Local Plan, officers are also working to progress the delivery of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town and to take forward the Developer Forum and other work related to the implementation of the Local Plan.

At the present time the Planning Policy team continues to liaise with all relevant landowners / developers through the Developer Forum only. This ensures a consistent and effective use of limited Council resources. However, during the Autumn the Planning Policy team, together with colleagues from Development Management, will be undertaking a series of meetings with relevant landowners and promoters of proposed strategic sites in order to discuss entering into Planning Performance Agreements, and further consider how relevant Strategic Masterplans will progress.

A review of the skills within the Council is underway in order to identify the resources and skills required to take forward Planning Performance Agreements and Strategic Masterplans in accordance with the approach endorsed by Cabinet in order to ensure the successful and timely delivery of the Local Plan.

Further details in relation to progress with the Local Plan and future timescales will be reported to Cabinet on 14 October 2017.

6. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

Work has been commissioned to establish interim governance arrangements, prepare a project programme (including a proposed structure of the team), establish a Quality Review Panel and undertake work on the proposed sustainable transport corridor. Consultants have been appointed to prepare a spatial vision and design charter for the Garden Town and this work is progressing well.

Interim Governance arrangements were approved by the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board on 31 July 2017 and are now being implemented. This includes the extension of the existing EFDC Local Plan Developer Forum to encompass all the sites in and around Harlow and to operate as a Garden Town Developer Forum. This will provide a basis for the long term planning and implementation of sites identified for allocation in the Local Plan and provides a basis for the coordination and management of Strategic Masterplans. A Garden Town Officer Steering Group and Member Board have been introduced which meet monthly.

A Garden Town Support Officer has been appointed on a one year fixed term contract. The Support Officer will play a key role in coordinating the work associated with the establishment and progression of the Garden Town, and will oversee key projects as required.